

Louisiana State Bank  
New Orleans, Louisiana

HABS No. 18-8

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District No. 18

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Richard Koch, District Officer  
614 Audubon Building, New Orleans, Louisiana

LOUISIANA STATE BANK BUILDING

Royal & Conti Streets - New Orleans - Orleans Parish

Owner

Case, Inc.

Date of Erection

1820

Architect

Benjamin Henry Latrobe

Builder

Benjamin Fox

Present Condition

Fair: Remodeled by Diboll, Owen and Goldstein in 1911.

Number of Stories

Two

Materials of Construction

Brick, cemented; brick dome and vaults; hipped  
slate roof.

Other existing Records:

Chain of Title at New Orleans Court House  
Newspaper clippings in dates 1818-1820  
New Orleans, Its Old Houses, Shops & Public Buildings -  
N. C. Curtis; J. E. Lippincott, 1933.  
Old New Orleans - Stanley Clisby Arthur - Harmanson,  
Publisher, New Orleans, 1936

Additional Data:

Of the early nineteenth century buildings in New Orleans few are more interesting historically or architecturally than the Louisiana State Bank Building.

It is on the north corner of Royal and Conti Streets, which was once the financial center of the Old City. The Bank of Louisiana, 1826, was diagonally opposite, while the Banque de la Louisiane, 1804, the first bank established in the Mississippi

Valley, was just down Royal Street in the same block. 7.

The Louisiana State Bank was incorporated with a capital of \$2,000,000 by an Act of the State Legislature in 1818 to endure until December 31, 1870. It was the first bank established after its admission to statehood.

A careful search of the notarial records reveals that the property on which the bank was erected was acquired by Pierre Cenas; the rear portions from Miss Victoire Griffon, February 21, 1793 and the front portion from Guilliana Guigman, January 25, 1796. The entire property was acquired from Cenas by Mrs. Stephen Zacharie, December 19, 1819, from whom the State Bank of Louisiana acquired it July 20, 1820.

Before purchasing the property the Bank had advertised their desire to purchase suitable land for the building. This ad, which appeared in the Louisiana Courier on July 27, 1818, reads as follows:

NOTICE TO OWNERS OF CITY LOTS

New Orleans  
July 16, 1818

The President and the Directors of the Louisiana State Bank wish to purchase a lot of ground in a suitable situation for the banking house, to be at least 60 feet front with the usual depth. Persons having property of this description for sale are requested to make their proposition in writing and deliver it to the Cashier on or before Wednesday, the 29th inst., specifying the situation and exact dimensions of the premises and the terms.

By order  
Richard Relf, Cashier.

This was two years before the property was finally acquired. The bank also advertised an architectural competition for the design of the building, the program appearing in the Louisiana Courier July 20, 1818, as follows:

New Orleans  
July 16, 1818

The President and the Directors of the Louisiana State Bank, having in contemplation to erect an edifice for the institution, which in its construction shall unite both convenience and taste, solicit the architects of the City to assist them with suitable plans.

It is intended that the building shall be constructed on a lot of at least sixty by one hundred and twenty feet, to have a front of forty feet and a depth of seventy, including a front portico, leaving an area of at least ten feet on each side. The portico to rest upon a basement of such height as will combine convenience of ascent with due proportion and effect.

The plan must include the elevation and distribution and be accompanied with an estimate. A premium of two hundred dollars will be allowed by the Board for the plan most approved of.

July 20

By order of the Board  
Richard Relf, Cashier

The results of the competition are unknown. Benjamin Henry Latrobe arrived in New Orleans on January 9, 1819, to complete the water works which had been left unfinished on the death of his son, H. S. B. Latrobe, September 3, 1817. He no doubt received the commission to design the bank after his arrival in the city, not as a result of the competition but on the basis of his splendid reputation as an architect, established through his work on the National Capitol,

and numerous other noteworthy buildings in the vicinity of Washington, Baltimore and Philadelphia. The acceptance of his design was announced in the following advertisement appearing in the Louisiana Courier and the New England newspapers on August 14, 1820:

NOTICE

TO BUILDERS AND UNDERTAKERS

Louisiana State Bank  
New Orleans, 10th August, 1820

The Board of Directors of the Louisiana State Bank having this day adopted the plan for a banking house submitted by B. H. Latrobe, Esq., give notice that this plan and description of the building are deposited with the Cashier, who will exhibit them - and that proposals for the erection of the building, made in writing, and under seal, addressed to "The Board", will be received by him until Thursday the 24th inst.

By order  
Richard Relf, Cashier

Louisiana Courier  
August 14, 1820.

This was Latrobe's last design as a few days later, September 4, 1820, the Courier carried the following:

Mr. H. B. H. Latrobe died yesterday at 4:00 o'clock P. M., leaving a numerous family to deplore the irreparable loss they have sustained.

Norman's NEW ORLEANS AND ENVIRONS, 1845, gives the date of erection as 1822, the architects, Latrobe and Benjamin Fox. The total cost is given as \$55,000.00. Benjamin Fox is listed in the early City Directories as a builder and it was probably he who erected the building after Latrobe's death.

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Latrobe was extremely interested in the old buildings of New Orleans and in his Journal he says:

"It would be worth while and if I can find time I will try to do something of the sort, to make a series of drawings representing the City as it now is, for it would be a safe wager that in a hundred years not a vestige will remain of the buildings as they now stand, excepting, perhaps, a few public buildings and of houses built since the American acquisition of the country."

It is difficult to say how much he was influenced by the architects of the Old City in his design, or how much his design influenced later buildings. There are in this vicinity, however, numerous examples of similar compositions; with high ground floor and entresol, and a much lower second story with wrought iron balcony across the facade at that level. The arrangement of living quarters above the business room is typical of New Orleans, as is also the courtyard with slave quarters. Latrobe's design is much more classic in feeling than most New Orleans buildings of that date, and closely resembles in character and detail his work in Washington and elsewhere.

The plan is interesting and well studied. A large circular domed banking room, the principal feature, occupies the center of a square, the corners of which are utilized as storage space. The principal entrance from Royal Street is through a domed vestibule, on either side of which are offices, with cloister vaulted ceilings.

Directly across the banking room from the entrance a vaulted passage

gives access to the semi-circular directors' room, the large windows of which open to the rear court or carriage yard. To the right of this passage is the bank vault and at the left a small door opens into the stair hall, from which a long, winding stair of forty-two risers ascends to the second floor apartment. The principal entrance to this stair hall is from Conti Street.

The treatment of all the rooms of the first floor is extremely simple. Smooth white plaster is applied directly to the solid brickwork of the walls, arches and domes, all of which are devoid of ornament save for a simple rosette at the center of the large vaulted dome of the banking room. This room is lighted by large triple windows in deep vaulted recesses at each side.

The plan of the second floor is that of a typical residence of the period. There is a spacious hall down the center with rooms on either side. The dining room occupies the semi-circular space above the directors' room.

The elevations are as carefully studied as the plan. The principal facade on Royal Street is composed symmetrically about the large doorway. Smaller openings flank the central feature. Strong horizontal emphasis is provided at the second floor level by projecting cornice and a fine wrought iron balcony in the center of which is a monogram panel with the initials "L. B. S." Three French windows with blinds open onto this balcony. The composition is surmounted by a large semi-circular head brick dormer which rises above the main

cornice and parapet. The hipped slate roof behind the parapet is not visible except from some distance from the building.

The entrance doorway is very well proportioned, the double wood panelled doors being separated from the side-lights by two Ionic columns. There is a semi-circular iron barred transom. The panelling in the doors has been somewhat changed and glass inserted in several of the panels. The side-lights have been replaced with wood panels.

A photograph made by Morgan Whitney about 1900 and included in this survey shows the doorway before these alterations. The windows at either side of the doorway have also been changed. They were originally somewhat similar to the large triple windows on the Conti Street side with heavy shutters, but were changed into show windows when the building was remodelled in 1910 by Diboll, Owen and Goldstein. Several changes in the interior were also made at this time, new openings being cut in the walls of the banking room.

The Conti Street elevation is marked at the center by a slightly projecting bay with a large triple window with semi-circular iron barred transom on the first floor. On the second floor a triple French door opens onto a wrought iron balcony. This bay is surmounted by a dormer similar to the one on the Royal Street elevation. Several new windows cut into this facade have somewhat spoiled it.

The rear elevation which faces the carriage yard is unique, having a large semi-circular bay in the center, with a wrought iron balcony following its curve at the second floor level. Across the yard is the carriage house and slave quarters, a two-story building.



The yard is closed off from the street by a brick wall which curves downward from the buildings to a cypress gate in the center, a typical composition for this sort of a courtyard arrangement. There are two gate-posts surmounted by ornamental balls of white marble. These balls recall similar ones of cast iron which are placed on the parapet of the main building at each corner and beside each dormer.

The building is most substantially constructed with massive brick walls, which are finished on the outside with an ochre colored stucco, marked off very faintly to represent stone coursing. The woodwork is all of cypress and is painted dark green.

All arches, vaults and domes of the first floor are of solid brickwork rendering the building as nearly fire-proof as it is possible to make it.

The roof construction is very odd and inexplicable. There are in fact two separate and distinct roofs, one above the other, the first an almost flat one and the other the hipped roof that is visible on the building. The inner roof is sheathed but there is no roofing on it. The outer roof is covered with slate with terra cotta hip and ridge tiles. The sides and roofs of the dormers are also of slate.

Samuel Wilson, Jr.

April 24, 1936

CHAIN OF TITLE

Situated on lower "lake" <sup>\*</sup>corner of Royal and Conti Streets and  
now owned by Case, Inc.

September 20, 1932

Case, Inc., acquired from Max Hochfelder by act before  
George A. Dreyfous.

Oct. 2, 1919

Max Hochfelder acquired from State National Bank of  
New Orleans, by act before A. D. Danziger, N. P.,  
acting for Felix J. Dreyfous, N. P.

State National Bank of New Orleans, Louisiana,  
acquired as successor of Louisiana State Bank.

July 20, 1820

State Bank of Louisiana acquired from Mrs. (ann Waters)  
Stephen Zacharie by act before Peter Pedesclaux, N. P.

December 19, 1819

Mrs. Stephen Zacharie acquired from Pierre Cenas by act  
before Peter Pedesclaux, N. P., December 19, 1819.

February 21, 1793

Pierre Cenas acquired from Guillianne Guigman by act before  
Fernando Rodriguez, N. P., January 25th, 1796 - for front  
portion of property and Miss Victoire Griffon by act before Peter  
Pedesclaux, N. P., for rear portion of property.

NOTE: The present building must have been constructed at a date later  
than January 25, 1796, as the division line by the last mentioned  
acquisition passes through the now existing building.

After a careful search of the notarial records no mention of, a  
building contract can be found which would definitely fix the erection.

\* Note: Lake, River, etc are used instead of the points of the compass.

The following description of the re-modeling of the banking room is given by General Allison Owen, Architect, of New Orleans, whose firm, Diboll, Owen and Goldstein did this work in 1910-11.

The most important change in the building was the outting of large openings between the officers' private offices at either side of the entrance and the large, circular central banking room, and enlarging the openings between the banking room and the offices to the rear of it. The building was also wired for electricity.

The brick dome over the circular banking room was found to be about a foot thick at the center and three feet thick at the spring. It is built of red brick and laid in an excellent mortar of oyster shell and lime. Several early banks were built with fire proof ceilings of brick, separate from the fire proof structure above them.

The screen of the banking room ran across the middle of the room at the diameter of the circle and was made of dark walnut with a very simple fence of 3/4 inch round spindles with a top rail above, the spindles appearing above the top rail like a picket fence. Behind this rail was hung a green baize curtain, which obstructed the view of the banking space behind the wickets. This screen on the inside of the banking space was considerably like a continuous sloping desk, with drawers and cupboards below and flat areas near the wickets for handling currency and silver.

The bank vault is still in place as originally installed; whether the door of the vault is the original door or not, we are unable to say, but it would seem to belong to a later period.

The two front windows on Royal Street were enlarged to make the building suitable for store purposes - the original design of these windows was similar to the smaller windows on Conti Street.

The residence of the executive of the bank, Richard Relf, is in the upper story, and there is considerable space above the vault of the lower floor and the floor joists of that story, which seems to have been used in part as a wine cellar.

In the restoration an effort was made to conserve the original conditions so far as possible. Nothing was added to the general character of the building. Inside the present high slate roof the decking of the original very low pitched roof is still in place. When the roof was changed, we do not know - the present high roof appears to be perfectly consistent with the architectural design.

These restorations were made immediately following the closing of the bank, which had been in continuous operation since the erection of the building. The directors' room is the circular room at the rear. The slave quarters in the rear of the courtyard were not disturbed at that time. An automobile garage door has since been cut into the end of it from Conti Street.

Allison Owen, F. A. I. A.

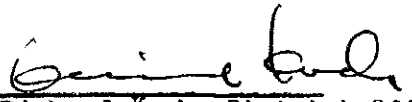
January, 1936

Further investigation should be made to prove that Latrobe's drawings were used in the erection of this building. To date no traces have been found amongst the local records. Benjamin Fox was a builder and also called himself an architect, so no doubt changes were made in Latrobe's conception of this building.

Since this building was measured by the Survey the owners have enclosed the courtyard with a frame building, in violation of both zoning and fire laws. This has ruined the interesting view from the side street, through the carriage driveway.

October 9, 1936

APPROVED:

  
Richard Koch, District Officer  
HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
IN LOUISIANA

Rec. Jan 7-37. H.W.